United Nations ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/20

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 February 2018

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

UNECE Executive Committee

Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

Twenty-fourth session
Geneva, 30 April and 1 May 2018
Item 9 of the provisional agenda
Advisory Group on the United Nations
Code for Trade and Transport Locations

Report of the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations Advisory Group on its first meeting

Summary

This report reflects the discussions and decisions of the first official United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Advisory Group meeting, 30 November – 1 December 2017. It was presented and agreed upon at the end of the Advisory group meeting.

This document is submitted to the twenty-fourth UN/CEFACT Plenary for endorsement.

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I. Attendance

1. The United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Advisory Group held its first meeting from 30 November to 1 December 2017.

2. The following countries were represented: Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Russian Federation, Sweden, Turkey and Ukraine. The following United Nations organizations participated in the meeting: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and Universal Postal Union (UPU). The following intergovernmental organizations and private sector participants participated in the meeting: adidas AG, Bureau International des Containers (BIC), Cosco, EuroGate Container Terminals, GeoNames, Google Switzerland, GT Nexus, Hamburg Sud, Hapag-Lloyd, International Air Transport Association (IATA), IHS Markit, Maersk Line, MSC, Ostendi Suisse Shipping Guides Ltd., and SMDG.

3. The Acting Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Chair of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group delivered opening remarks, highlighting the importance of UN/LOCODE and the establishment of the Advisory Group. They also underlined the effective partnership between the public and private sector as well as the relevance of UN/LOCODE to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

II. Discussion on development issues

4. On the subject of data synchronization between the UN/LOCODE releases and user applications/databases, presentations were made by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), SMDG, and GT Nexus. The paperwork involved with Data Maintenance Requests (DMRs) and the ambiguity of some of the elements related to UN/LOCODE leaves a lot of room for interpretation. It was stated that greater international consistency in interpretations and in the levels of granularity would be beneficial to all users. It was stressed that it is important to provide a clear definition of what is meant by "location." Some users do not have automatic data synchronization and only update their systems at the request of users.

5. On the subject of UN/LOCODE entries, the definitions provided for the functions in Recommendation 16 do not seem to be applied in a consistent manner. The official definitions of function 6 (inland clearance depot) would imply that these must be related to a customs procedure and authorization; function 1 (port) implies that it should only be for maritime ports; function 5 (postal exchange office) should only be for international mail processing centres and thus only approved by UPU; function 4 (airports) should perhaps be validated by either IATA, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) or both. It was pointed out that location names need to be as precise as possible; the problem of translated entries (code present several times with each translation of the name) can cause confusion. It was also noted that pending requests should be regularized as quickly as possible.

6. On the subject of data quality, the Focal Point of Cyprus pointed out the necessity for geographically correct entries with correct location names for locations that are relevant to (i.e. used regularly for) international trade. The need to address de facto locations outside the effective control of governments was pointed out. The question of who can make requests and how these requests are validated was brought up. It was suggested that, for retail purposes, it is very useful to have a UN/LOCODE which is a free and open standard, even for very small locations. Furthermore, many inconsistencies were underlined such as

function 1 (port) being used in inland locations, very small locations with no link to international trade with codes, and single locations with multiple codes. The UNECE secretariat pointed out the importance of Focal Points on this matter as they should be verifying content and correctness; the secretariat can only verify coherency of the rules.

7. On the subject of major changes in the releases, it was underlined that these, like the one of 2014, can cause major issues for the user community. It was emphasized that changing established codes should be avoided. Alternatively, advance notification of future changes (up to a year) was requested. Care should be taken to avoid recycling codes for different locations, which can have a major impact on users.

8. On the subject of which concept should be supported—point or area—presentations were offered from Hapag-Lloyd, GeoNames, Cosco and IATA. The principle of supporting "area" for a canal, for example, could be pertinent for the user community, especially for routing purposes. It was further suggested that port facilities should be treated as areas and that other related codes be used to identify container terminals or quays. However, if an "area" is supported, questions were raised as to how to delimit these: the area defined as circles, as polygons, as municipalities… In other location code use, metropolitan areas are used for pricing and scheduling purposes, but not for actual routing. There was also a request to establish a geolocation coordinate for all UN/LOCODEs, even when they are "areas" (not necessarily specific points).

9. The issue of child coding systems was presented with interventions from IMO, BIC and Portinfo. For two of these, UN/LOCODE is used as a base and a four-character extension (some child repositories are up to six) is used to identify legal entities for container transactions and provide more granularity on actual terminals within a port. It was underlined that complete contact details of the requestor of any code is linked to some of these child coding systems. The integration of information from UN/LOCODE publications was underlined as important in all cases. It was suggested that it would be beneficial to the user community to publish these child repositories—perhaps in a harmonized manner—with the official UN/LOCODE repository or at perhaps through a link out to their solutions. Cross-referencing to IATA, ICAO and IMO location codes was suggested as a benefit for users. A question was raised as to whether there should only be one entry for one place or if we should allow hierarchies.

III. Discussion on development issues

10. The establishment of a network of Focal Points has been discussed in the three previous UN/LOCODE meetings. This has prompted a proposal to revise the current data maintenance system and database. IHS Markit proposed an interactive system to request new UN/LOCODEs or revise existing ones; they proposed a more dynamic approach to changes and new requests so there could be publications throughout the year instead of only twice a year. The management of validation should also be automated if possible, instead of using Excel Spreadsheets.

11. The secretariat explained the work load of UN/LOCODE internally. As a result, a network of Focal Points has been put into place to assist in this process. However not all countries have a National Focal Point and not all FPs are actively contributing as of today. For this reason, the secretariat has requested ideas to improve the situation.

12. Several ways forward were suggested:

- Requesting a nominal fee to ensure submissions are serious and meaningful, installing discipline by the requestors;

- Require requestors to clarify and support their DMRs—indicate why they request a change or a new code (make the comment field obligatory);
- The nomination of a National Focal Point can also have a positive effect, such as progressively reduced numbers of DMRs;
- Crowdsource identification, having multiple stakeholders validate a port or location;
- If fees are put in place, people who participate in the process (present here and active in this group) should not be required to pay;
- Require requestors to pre-register before they can download to learn their use case—but keep the process free of charge;
- Study the possibility of having a donor provide or develop a new IT system for the secretariat free of charge which could be hosted on United Nations (UN) platforms and compliant to UN rules;
- Establish a group of experts (ideally a sufficiently large enough group to not always rely on the same people) to support Focal Points in validating new code requests and changes. This would require a lot of work twice a year when validation is being performed. Those who manage child repositories are very interested.

IV. Decisions of the Advisory Group and inputs to UN/CEFACT Programme of Work

13. The UN/LOCODE Advisory Group:

- Acknowledges the importance of UN/LOCODE as a free international standard with wide use in trade, transport and regulatory documents;
- Recognizes that the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group play an indispensable role in dealing with all important issues related to UN/LOCODE maintenance and development;
- Congratulates Ms. Sue Probert as the first chair of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group;
- Agrees that all decisions be made by consensus and reported to the next UN/CEFACT Plenary;
- Agrees that the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group be open for all stakeholders on a volunteer basis;
- Takes note, with appreciation, of the recent work undertaken by the UNECE secretariat;
- Takes further note that all members of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group be registered as UN/CEFACT experts and given access to the Collaborative UN/CEFACT Environment (CUE);
- Invites UN/CEFACT to revise the UNECE Recommendation 16 through the UN/CEFACT Open Development Process, taking into consideration the following elements (**Decision 17-01**):
    - Provide a clear definition of what the UN/LOCODE means, its scope and what granularity should be used;

- Provide clear guidance on all aspects of UN/LOCODE to eliminate areas of ambiguity (interpretation of what a location is, addition of new functions, definitions of functions, etc.);
- Set out how to register significant changes (what this means, if deletion should be allowed, what delay should be provided to allow the user community to prepare…);
- Define how DMRs should be announced and communicated (acknowledgement of receipt of DMR, acknowledgement once it has been accepted or rejected with the reasons…);
- Officially designate the use of "0" (zero) as a location that does not have an official function (function zero should not be combined with any other function). It could also be used to deprecate codes without deleting them from the list;
- Consider requiring the registration of those who request codes (for post-verifications or future questions);
- Consider how to share the history of DMRs;
- Determine how to standardize multilingual entries and aliases in an unambiguous way;
- Propose solutions for the reuse of UN/LOCODEs (in child repositories, for example) and how these could be identified and shared in the UN/LOCODE repository.

- Emphasizes the importance of UN/LOCODE Focal Points and encourages more governments to nominate National Focal Points (NFPs) to enhance the UN/LOCODE Focal Point Network **(Decision 17-02)**;
- Requests that the secretariat create a questionnaire (with Survey Monkey or other) to build consensus on some of the key points (**Decision 17-03**);
- Requests the UNECE secretariat to acknowledge child coding systems using the UN/LOCODE **(Decision 17-04)**;
- Requests the UNECE secretariat organize meetings for the Advisory Group on a regular basis, at least annually **(Decision 17-05)**;
- Welcomes the establishment of more National Focal Points and more key stakeholders to join the Advisory Group.

VI. Adoption of decisions and report

14. The UN/LOCODE Advisory Group adopted the decisions noted above and the report of the first meeting (Decision 17-06).